

(Credit: DSAA)



Launch of the Development Studies Association of Australia

By Philippa Smales and Kearnin Sims
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For those of us in the development sector in Australia, this has been a long time coming. The UK Development Studies Association was formed back in 1978, the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development formed around the same time, and the Aotearoa New Zealand International Development Studies Network started in 1996. Japan, Korea and many other countries already have similar associations. Now in 2019, the Development Studies Association of Australia (DSAA) is here.

The formation of the DSAA is the product of a lot of hard work by far too many people to name. Contributions came from across Australia (and internationally) to achieve the shared vision of promoting development studies critical inquiry, reflection, research, and teaching in Australia.

The DSAA will build on and expand much of the work undertaken by the Research for Development Impact (RDI) Network over the last couple of years by further facilitating collaborations and engagement within Australia's international development research community. Since development studies is an interdisciplinary field of research, academics can be located across multiple schools and colleges at universities – making it challenging to build both intra-institutional and cross-institutional collaborations. Part of the remit of the DSAA will be to respond to this challenge by increasing Australia-wide scholarly engagement.

The arrival of the DSAA is much needed. According to DSAA mapping, development studies is currently being taught at 24 Australian universities (see earlier mapping from 2015 in the back of this [report](#)) and, while the total number of academics contributing to research or teaching in development studies is unknown, the New Zealand DevNet [network](#) has over 2,000 members (including from the Pacific, Australia and other countries). As both policy and academia grapple with a rapidly changing global development landscape, the DSAA will also seek to work collaboratively with existing institutions such as DevNet and the RDI Network.

As is summarised on the new DSAA [website](#), development studies is interdisciplinary, co-constituted through disciplines such as law, anthropology, sociology, gender, economics, political science and international relations, human geography, critical historical studies, environmental humanities, Indigenous studies, and decolonial and postcolonial studies, as well as some of the technical and natural sciences. The DSAA recognises that development studies is a heavily contested field that requires and demands a space for ongoing inclusive dialogue and debate about the complex nature of development. Indeed, this interdisciplinarity of the field is a key strength of development studies.

The arrival of the DSAA has been a gradual process that has been nurtured through long-standing collaboration efforts. In recent years, the 2017 ‘Rethinking development pedagogy and practice: new visions for global development’ [symposium](#) at James Cook University marked an important step in building the community. In addition to formal paper presentations, this event included time for more than 30 scholars, practitioners and students of development to come together to discuss how we might better improve the content and delivery of development studies programs across Australia.

Following this stimulating discussion, it was determined that a follow-up event was required – and in 2018 the ‘Pedagogy in practice: how we teach in development studies’ [symposium](#) was convened by Murdoch University to explore how we can better teach (and learn) international development. As [noted](#) by one of the participants, “it further advanced important questions regarding how development studies pedagogies might respond to emergent shifts in the global development sector, and reconsolidated the strong collegial bonds that tie together scholars and practitioners of our community of practice”. Finally, in October 2018, these two events – and the formation of the DSAA – were further advanced by UNSW’s ‘Development studies in Australia today: reflections, challenges, opportunities’ panel discussion.

This year a development studies pedagogy symposium will not be held due to all the time being taken up in associating the DSAA, **but there will be a soft launch of the DSAA at the [RDI Conference](#) on 12 June at La Trobe University.**

The DSAA soft launch will be held between the end of the first day and the RDI conference dinner. Both the RDI conference and dinner require [registration](#), but anyone is welcome to join the DSAA soft launch at the Eagle Bar, La Trobe University, from 5.15 pm. Then, in 2020, the DSAA intends to launch its inaugural conference.

As development studies is a field with dynamic boundaries, the DSAA wants to welcome engagement with all stakeholders interested in processes of development. Therefore, there

are several membership categories on the [website](#), from salaried academic to student or development professional. If you sign up as a member before the RDI conference, you can also attend the very first AGM on at lunchtime on 12 June, vote in the committee election, and have the opportunity to steer the direction of the DSAA and build an association that works for its members.

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